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ABSTRACT

We are, for the second time in a hundred years, experiencing a revolution in the politics of education. In the 1890s municipal reform wrested control of urban school systems from city political machines and their neighborhood subunits. Since then the structure of school government has rested on two types of legitimacy. These are a belief in professionalism and a commitment to middle-class influence. The institution of the nonpartisan, at-large school board not only cut the roots of the urban machine, it also destroyed neighborhood and parent access to educational decision-making. For two decades now the second political revolution has challenged the legitimacy of the professionals and the middle class. A teacher organization elite has now replaced the administrator elite. New building level access mechanisms have arisen in mandated advisory groups and community school efforts. We are now entering a trial and error phase in the second political revolution. Technological issues about teaching and learning need to be resolved before the trial and error process can end fruitfully. Careful natural history studies with open-ended theory generation as requisite goals will provide the understanding needed for the early years after the present revolution. (Author/JM)

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ACCESS AND LEGITIMACY IN SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

by

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We are , for the second time in a hundred years, experiencing a revolution in the politics of education. Political doctrines of legitimacy of structural arrangement for access to decisions are undergoing change in this revolution. It has reached dramatically into the internal power balances of the school. It has already significantly modified the doctrines of educational governments which provided the premises for policy decision-making for more than half a century. Now it is reaching into issues about the structural nature of educational government in the United States. Said another way, over two decades ago a reform in educational politics and policies began around issues of equality, quality and expertise. These may be seen in the 1954 Court decision on race and in the post-Sputnik shift in curriculum-making power from traditional educationists to the faculties of academe, those in science and mathematics first. As this revolution increased its speed it changed its target to the modification of internal power relations among professional groups, specifically between the administrator elite and teacher ranks. It dramatically engaged conflicts around the issues of lay versus professional influence. Now, increasingly a divergence can be seen between what I have called the "macro" LEA political system and the "micro", site-level political systems.[1]

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The resolution of such revolutionary issues will result less from technical research findings and conclusions than from issues of social value, of power relations, and of technical requirements for teaching-learning. As to the latter I particularly mean the conditions necessary for learning which successfully link a person work flow of inter-connected activities of the school, the pupil and the home.[2] This technology must not only produce effective learning but also command a sense of support and legitimacy from the public. I will add that public services, whatever their appearance, can never command but can only invite public support.

The resolution of these issues are likely to await the resolution of questions of governance doctrines and educational governmental structure. These will involve public agreement, probably achieved through trial and error learning about legitimacy for policy and decision-making and the nature of educational governmental structures, in particular elements of access for parents. Historically the present spread of political conflict appears analogous to those of the 1890s. These eventually restructured American educational government as municipal reform took control of urban school system from city political machines and their neighborhood subunits. In the process the reform destroyed the neighborhood as a political base of significant access to decisions about the person work flow of school site pupil-teacher relations, pupil-pupil relations, and school site pupil-home relations.[2] The PTA developments of the twenties, thirties and forties provided a limited form of structural access at the site level. Even this middle

class biased access system was significantly impaired in the fifties.[1]

The historical view not only locates the present in the midst of a second political revolution, it also notes the reemergence of basic issues in educational governance. These were set aside from the center stage of political controversy in education for about half of this century. They were subordinated to other issues by a new system of public access to educational policy, the structure of educational government revised by the reform, as well as the ideology which functioned as the premises of legitimacy for defining and judging educational issues.[3] The reemergence of such basic issues suggests an end to the doctrines of one political era and the beginning of another.

The dominant system of educational governance (K-12) has rested upon beliefs concerning the legitimacy of holders of authority and the appropriateness of issues hospitable to the structural development in the early part of the century. Implicit in those arrangements is public agreement on who shall govern and the nature of a proper school district's governmental structure. These have been the basic policy premises of over fifty years in educational politics. Ideology and structure in politics are interdependent. Government structures determine access in two ways, at least. Their established sequence of meetings of groups may be ordered with respect to time in a flow of decisions. That sequencing as I have elsewhere illustrated,[4] determines largely the nature of the role and the impact of groups upon the system for decision-making. Secondly, the choice in that structure of what may be decided where legitimates issues and actors in that temporal sequence.

These structural decisions determine to a large extent which issues and values are given what sort of attention in the politics of education.[5] This is one meaning of the statement "organization is the mobilization of bias." Precisely because organization is the mobilization of bias a fundamental change in the nature of the issues will place an intolerable stress upon the old structured which channel conflicts. Either they must be restructured or the new issues in conflict must be displaced by ones compatible with the old structures. This is why Schattschneider says, "That the substitution of conflicts is the most devastating kind of political strategy. All forms of political organization," he says, "have a bias in favor of the exploitation of some kinds of conflict and the suppression of others because organization is the mobilization of bias."[6] Therefore, a substitution of issues based on different assumptions from those which have functioned as the premises for incremental decision making in any political system and any policy system is the surest way to transmute political conflict and turn existing political alignments inside out.[1]

The traditional mutually dependent structure and ideology of the school government for most of this century rest upon two doctrines of legitimacy. Briefly, these are a belief in professionalism and a commitment toward middle class influence in education. This is another way of saying the municipal reform represented a political victory of middle class White Anglo Saxon Protestant elites and their professional allies. The most important governmental structure designed to reflect this political formula was the present LEA structure. The non-partisan, at-large, elected, district wide, board not only cut the roots of the

urban machine, it also produced a political wasteland at the building level. It destroyed neighborhood and parent access to educational decision-making. One result of this was the increased professionalization of site level decisions.

Advocacy of the at large election system was deliberately designed to take advantage of the social inequality of neighborhoods. It was a device to politically disenfranchise the poor. The structure of government was restructured in such a manner that access to decision-making centers was convenient only for individuals and interest groups inclined to support the reform ideology because of their social class outlook. The reform and its doctrines made school districts structurally and ideologically less vulnerable to the urban neighborhood based political machine. It created a new vulnerability at the LEA level, where LEA macro politics are played. Upper-middle-class interest groups filled the void. The middle class and professional domination of educational decision-making was assured.

The fundamental character of educational politics was changed in another manner too. The weakening of the attendance area community depressing the influence of neighborhood groups of parents reduced site level access and the possibility to express concern for micro politics, building level issues, of the activity linkages between school-pupil-home of teaching and learning. Macro LEA issues especially tax questions tended instead to dominate political decision-making in such a structure.

By the 1920s, the earlier political revolution in education was in place. Obviously, it did not eliminate or suppress politics in education.

What it did was substitute a different, non-party, elite interest group politics for that which had existed. Its ideology was a thorough going political apologia for the strong administrative state professionally managed.[7] Politically it has conferred special advantages on the insider. Its politics is "the politics of the sacred, rural rather than secular, urban community; a politics of the priesthood rather than the hustings."[8] It depends on the informal development of consensus prior to public debate. The legitimacy granted the professional in decision-making allows him his hocus pocus, a protection needed for his professional practice. At the same time it erects barriers against client access even to observe decision-making.

A political revolution in education simultaneously challenges the established structure for access to decisions and the belief in the legitimacy both of who shall decide and what values shall function as the premises for decisions. At the same time, fundamental tensions in the nature of public education in America reemerge for political decision-making. Briefly, these are the educational aspect of the struggle between the few and the many. That struggle is seen by Aristotle and most political theorists as the powder keg underlying all societies. Given the significance of professionalization in this century, the struggle between the few and the many must be considered in two of its aspects. There is a conflict within the professional social system between administrators and teachers. 1960 was a turning point in that. The conflict within the lay system between the LEA elite and the building level, parents and clients is now becoming sharper. The LEA elite whether school administrators, teacher union

leaders, or LEA influentials are more adept at and concerned with macro LEA politics, which are primarily economic issues. The latter, whether classroom teacher, parents, or neighborhood influentials, are more concerned with the micro political issues of the linkage between teaching-learning-parenting, issues of behavior, growth and development. However, cutting across these conflicts between the few and the many within each major subsystem, professional and lay, of the educational political system, is the equally basic conflict between the professional and lay subsystems themselves over the balance of power question .

We are now entering upon a trial and error phase in this second political revolution. For two decades it has challenged the legitimacy of those who traditionally governed in education. Within the professional sybsystem, it has already upset the historic doctrine of administrative leadership by the partial substitution of a teacher organization elite for the former administrator elite. Within the lay subsystem, the issues of cultural pluralism can be seen as leading to fumbling efforts towards discovering new models for maintaining social unity and cultural diversity. These may be seen in new building level access mechanisms in mandated advisory groups and old community school efforts. Government structures in education are experiencing trial and error attempts at many levels. These are developing between national and state levels, state and LEA levels, and within the LEA between its macro political levels and its micro organizational units.

Technological issues about teaching and learning need to be resolved before the trial and error process we are now experiencing can end fruitfully. There is nothing like that in the urban LEA yet. The discretion necessary in the nexus of pupil-teacher or better, teaching

learning activity systems demand a policy structure with considerable decision latitude as close to that set of relationships as possible, rather than far apart as these now are.[5] Such a structure implies development of legitimated access mechanisms for ease of interaction between the school and parents. That interaction will develop, I now suspect through combined efforts of trial and error learning in three dimensions, perhaps four. 1) We need and are fumbling our way toward better concepts for understanding how we can maintain cultural diversities within a rapidly changing society, which needs to be capable of strongly uniting in this world. 2) We need to learn to develop appropriate access structural mechanisms for parent input and public observation of site level decision-making. 3) These essentially political issues parallel the trial and error learning needed at the technological level of teaching and learning to develop effective person work flows between teaching, learning, and parenting. 4) Colleageal observation and peer evaluation of teaching behavior reducing teacher isolation and increasing the defensibility of professional decisions will be needed to decrease the unnecessary hokus pocus and provide the due protection needed for a fruitful growth in the public observability of school activities.

These trial and error requirements demand that policy makers develop an experimental learning stance toward new policies. The teacher organizations will need to provide far more site level flexibility and grass roots power within the organization than the industrial bargaining model generally develops. Research funds will need to be allocated to track and explain experiments in newly legitimated

access arrangements not to find out what works! The focus needs to be on why somethings work some places but not elsewhere. Better, under what conditions do which try outs fail and which succeed?

Research monies should not be spent to experimentally create new site level access mechanisms for two reasons. These would probably have less legitimacy than others which already exist. There are more than enough such natural innovative efforts available for study. The difficulty is the stance taken toward these by virtually everyone. They are viewed as either absolute ultimate solutions by federal or state policy people or as the latest invention of Devil by LEA elites.

There are already at hand governmentally mandated site level access mechanisms. The Mott Foundation's community school efforts with its nineteenth century progressive values deserves systematic record keeping and analysis by trained field workers. I am surprised Kettering with its concern for individualized instruction is not doing work on the person work flow activity sequences created. The Wisconsin school community research group is doing such work around Wisconsin's technological changes with individualization of instruction at its heart. Part of the difficulty, you see, is that the researchers who know instruction do not know LEA politics.

These foundations will not support school community studies of the sort we need. The stance I here propose will not be studied with federal funds. Federal research funding for organizational studies or political processes in education is almost non existent. The N.I.E.

record is one of criminal neglect. So long as policy makers, agency personnel and search bureaucrats continue to believe that outdated fairy tale that we already know, we only need to put it to work, the present political revolution in education will go on ignored by research funded programs.

But that does not mean we cannot make the contribution the society has a right to expect from us. Not a few of us have with little or no help from funding sources done a reasonable job of making sense out of issues and questions completely unresearched less than fifteen years ago. For well over a decade almost all the contributions I have made in the politics of education was unfunded research and writing. We can continue to make our contributions. What we need to do is focus our efforts upon the natural trial and error developments in the micro as well as macro LEA politics. Careful natural history studies with open ended theory generation as requisite goals will provide the understanding needed for the early years after the present revolution in the politics of education.

References

1. I have attempted to discuss the distinction and its implication for teachers in "School Governance and Its Community Socio-Political Environment," 1975, prepared for Teacher Corps, U.S.-O.E. and for administrators in Educational Policy Systems, (Nova University press, Fort Lauderdale, Fla., 1975). Governance implications for state and federal policy are explored in my Problems of Financing Inner City Schools, (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Research Foundation, 1971) and with others in Organizing and Governing Education, Report to the New York State Commission on Quality, Costs, and Financing of Elementary and Secondary Education, (Cambridge, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 1971). It is used in connection with the national drift in the present revolution in educational politics in my chapter forthcoming in the 1977 NSSE Yearbook.

2. The person-task work flow distinction and some of its implications were introduced by Jacquetta Hill-Burnett, "Workflow Versus Classroom Models of Academic Work," Michigan Journal of Secondary Education, 1968, Volume 9: 14-24 and is used fruitfully in her 1974 Final Report: Anthropological Study of Disability from Educational Problems of Puerto Rican Youths, Volume I, SRS, DHEW-RD-2969-G69 (ERIC ED 107 742). This distinction will be significant for addressing the problem I suggested is central to the resolution at the technical level of the present political revolution in education at the AERA Annual Meeting, New Orleans, 1973, "Politics of Education-Its Potential Contributions to Policy and Planning," paper.

3. See my forthcoming chapter in NSSE Yearbook on Politics and Education, 1977, for discussion of interdependence of changes in ideological premises and governmental structures in both the first educational political revolution of this century and the present one. It builds on Charles E. Lindblom, The Policy Making Process (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall Inc., 1968).

4. Daniel E. Griffiths, et al., Organizing Schools for Effective Education, Danville, Illinois: The Interstate, 1962, see part IV.

5. Not especially Problems of Financing Inner City Schools and Educational Policy Systems in reference to #1 above.

6. E.E. Schattschneider, The Semisovereign People (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1960).

7. The significance of this for educational politics is discussed in the NSSE 1977 chapter cited above, #1 and indebted to Dwight Waldo, The Administrative State: A Study of the Political Theory of American Public Administration (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1948).

8. Laurence Iannaccone and Frank W. Lutz, "The Changing Politics of Education," AAUW Journal, (May, 1967, Vol. 60, No. 4), page 161.